

Pope Francis & Religious Freedom

Visit to the United States | September 2015

Welcoming Ceremony

South Lawn of the White House, Washington, D.C. | Wednesday, September 23, 2015

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150923_usa-benvenuto.html

- “American Catholics are committed to building a society which is truly tolerant and inclusive, to safeguarding the rights of individuals and communities, and to rejecting every form of unjust discrimination. With countless other people of good will, they are likewise concerned that efforts to build a just and wisely ordered society respect their deepest concerns and their right to religious liberty. That freedom remains one of America’s most precious possessions. And, as my brothers, the United States Bishops, have reminded us, all are called to be vigilant, precisely as good citizens, to preserve and defend that freedom from everything that would threaten or compromise it.”



Visit to the Joint Session of the United States Congress

United States Capitol, Washington, D.C. | Thursday, September 24, 2015

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150924_usa-us-congress.html

- “Building a future of freedom requires love of the common good and cooperation in a spirit of subsidiarity and solidarity.”
- “In recent centuries, millions of people came to this land to pursue their dream of building a future in freedom.”

Meeting with the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization

United Nations Headquarters, New York | Friday, September 25, 2015

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html



- “[G]overnment leaders must do everything possible to ensure that all can have the minimum spiritual and material means needed to live in dignity and to create and support a family, which is the primary cell of any social development. In practical terms, this absolute minimum has three names: lodging, labour, and land; and one spiritual name: spiritual freedom, which includes religious freedom, the right to education and all other civil rights.”
- “[T]he simplest and best measure and indicator of the implementation of the new *Agenda* for development will be effective, practical and immediate access, on the part of all, to essential material and spiritual goods: housing, dignified and properly remunerated employment, adequate food and drinking water; religious freedom and, more generally, spiritual freedom and education.”
- “[T]he most basic understanding of human dignity compels the international community, particularly through the norms and mechanisms of international law, to do all that it can to stop and to prevent further systematic violence against ethnic and religious minorities’ and to protect innocent peoples.”
- “I must renew my repeated appeals regarding [...] the painful situation of the entire Middle East, North Africa and other African countries, where Christians, together with other cultural or ethnic groups, and even members of the majority religion who have no desire to be caught up in hatred and folly, have been forced to witness the destruction of their places of worship, their cultural and religious heritage, their houses and property, and have faced the alternative either of fleeing or of paying for their adhesion to good and to peace by their own lives, or by enslavement.”

Meeting for Religious Liberty with the Hispanic Community and Other Immigrants

Independence Hall, Philadelphia | Saturday, September 25, 2015

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150926_usa-liberta-religiosa.html

- “The Declaration of Independence stated that all men and women are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that governments exist to protect and defend those rights.”



- “When individuals and communities are guaranteed the effective exercise of their rights, they are not only free to realize their potential, they also, through their talents and their hard work, contribute to the welfare and enrichment of society as a whole.”
- “It [religious freedom] is a fundamental right which shapes the way we interact socially and personally with our neighbors whose religious views differ from our own.”
- “The ideal of interreligious dialogue, where all men and women, from different religious traditions, can speak to one another without arguing. This is what religious freedom allows.”

- “In a world where various forms of modern tyranny seek to suppress religious freedom, or [...] try to reduce it to a subculture without right to a voice in the public square, or to use religion as a pretext for hatred and brutality, it is imperative that the followers of the various religious traditions join their voices in calling for peace, tolerance and respect for the dignity and the rights of others.”

- “Religious freedom certainly means the right to worship God, individually and in community, as our consciences dictate. But religious liberty, by its nature, transcends places of worship and the private sphere of individuals and families. Because religion itself, the religious dimension, is not a subculture; it is part of the culture of every people and every nation.”

- “Let us preserve freedom. Let us cherish freedom. Freedom of conscience, religious freedom, the freedom of each person, each family, each people, which is what gives rise to rights.”

- “[May] you defend these rights, especially your religious freedom, for it has been given to you by God himself.”



In-Flight Press Conference

Return to Rome from Philadelphia | Monday, September 28, 2015

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/09/28/pope_francis_p%E2%80%99m_not_a_star,_but_the_servant_of_servants_o/1175317

- “I can say the conscientious objection is a right that is a part of every human right. It is a right. And if a person does not allow others to be a conscientious objector, he denies a right.”
- “Conscientious objection must enter into every juridical structure because it is a right, a human right.”
- “It (conscientious objection) is a human right. [...] It is a right and if we want to make peace we have to respect all rights.”

Additional Quotes on Religious Freedom

- “[A] healthy pluralism...does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual’s conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques.”
– [Evangelii Gaudium](#) (“The Joy of the Gospel”), no. 255
- “In this sense, social ecology is necessarily institutional, and gradually extends to the whole of society, from the primary social group, the family, to the wider local, national and international communities. Within each social stratum, and between them, institutions develop to regulate human relationships. Anything which weakens those institutions has negative consequences, such as injustice, violence and loss of freedom.”
– [Laudato Si’](#) (“Praise Be”), no. 142
- “We must not be afraid of being Christian and living as Christians! We must have this courage to go and proclaim the Risen Christ, for he is our peace; he made peace with his love, with his forgiveness, with his blood and with his mercy.” – [Apr. 7, 2013](#)
- “What does freedom mean? It is certainly not doing whatever you want, allowing yourself to be dominated by the passions, to pass from one experience to another without discernment, to follow the fashions of the day; freedom does not mean, so to speak, throwing everything that you don't like out the window... Let us not be afraid of life commitments, commitments that take up and concern our entire life! In this way our life will be fruitful! And this is freedom: to have the courage to make these decisions with generosity.” – [May 4, 2013](#)
- “We must promote religious liberty for all people. Every man and woman must be free to profess his or her faith, whatever it may be. Why? Because that man and that woman are children of God.” – [May 20, 2013](#)
- “Freedom means being able to think about what we do, being able to assess what is good and what is bad, these are the types of conduct that lead to development; it means always opting for the good. Let us be free for goodness.” – [June 7, 2013](#)
- “In today’s world, religious freedom is more often affirmed than put into practice.” Defending religious liberty “guarantees the growth and development of the entire community.” – [June 8, 2013](#)
- “Religious freedom is not only that of private thought or worship. It is the liberty to live, both privately and publicly, according to the ethical principles resulting from found truth.” – [June 20, 2014](#)
- “Every human is a ‘seeker’ of truth on his origins and destiny. In his mind and in his ‘heart’, questions and thoughts arise that cannot be repressed or stifled, since they emerge from the depths of the person and are a part of the intimate essence of the person. They are religious questions, and religious freedom is necessary for them to manifest themselves fully.” – [June 20, 2014](#)
- “We cannot deny that intolerance towards those with different religious convictions is a particularly insidious enemy, one which today is being witnessed in various areas around the world. All believers must be particularly vigilant so that, in living out with conviction our religious and ethical code, we may always express the mystery we intend to honour.” – [Sept. 23, 2014](#)
- “Authentic religion is a source of peace and not of violence! No one must use the name of God to commit violence! To kill in the name of God is a grave sacrilege. To discriminate in the name of God is inhuman.” – [Sept. 23, 2014](#)
- “Whenever adherence to a specific religious tradition gives birth to service that shows conviction, generosity and concern for the whole of society without making distinctions, then there too exists an authentic and mature living out of religious freedom... The more men and women are at the service of others, the greater their freedom!”
– [Sept. 23, 2014](#)



- “When, in the name of an ideology, there is an attempt to remove God from society, it ends up adoring idols, and very soon men and women lose their way, their dignity is trampled and their rights violated.” – [Sept. 23, 2014](#)
- “I cannot fail to recall the many instances of injustice and persecution which daily afflict religious minorities, and Christians in particular, in various parts of our world. Communities and individuals today find themselves subjected to barbaric acts of violence: they are evicted from their homes and native lands, sold as slaves, killed, beheaded, crucified or burned alive, under the shameful and complicit silence of so many.” – [Nov. 25, 2014](#)
- “In the end, what kind of dignity is there without the possibility of freely expressing one’s thought or professing one’s religious faith? What dignity can there be without a clear juridical framework which limits the rule of force and enables the rule of law to prevail over the power of tyranny? What dignity can men and women ever enjoy if they are subjected to all types of discrimination?” – [Nov. 25, 2014](#)

- “Nor, in writing to you, can I remain silent about the members of other religious and ethnic groups who are also experiencing persecution and the effects of these conflicts. Every day I follow the new reports of the enormous suffering endured by many people in the Middle East. I think in particular of the children, the young mothers, the elderly, the homeless and all refugees, the starving and those facing the prospect of a hard winter without an adequate shelter. This suffering cries out to God and it calls for our commitment to prayer and concrete efforts to help in any way possible. I want to express to all of you my personal closeness and solidarity, as well as that of the whole Church, and to offer you a word of consolation and hope.” – [Dec. 21, 2014](#)



- “The tragic situation faced by our Christian brothers and sisters in Iraq, as well as by the Yazidi and members of other religious and ethnic communities, demands that all religious leaders clearly speak out to condemn these crimes unanimously and unambiguously, and to denounce the practice of invoking religion in order to justify them.” – [Dec. 21, 2014](#)
- “Dear brothers and sisters who courageously bear witness to Jesus in the land blessed by the Lord, our consolation and our hope is Christ himself. I encourage you, then, to remain close to him, like branches on the vine, in the certainty that no tribulation, distress or persecution can separate us from him (cf. *Rom* 8:35). May the trials which you are presently enduring strengthen the faith and the fidelity of each and all of you!” – [Dec. 21, 2014](#)
- “Today the Churches and ecclesial communities in Europe find themselves facing new and decisive challenges, which can only be answered effectively by speaking with one voice. I am thinking, for example, of the challenge posed by legislators who, in the name of some badly interpreted principle of tolerance, end up preventing citizens from freely expressing and practicing their own religious convictions in a peaceful and legitimate way.” – [May 7, 2015](#)
- There is, however, also “another kind of persecution that is not often spoken about”, Francis noted. The first form of persecution “is due to confessing the name of Christ” and it is thus “a clear, explicit type of persecution”. The other kind of persecution is “disguised as culture, disguised as modernity, disguised as progress: it is a kind of — I would say somewhat ironically — polite persecution”. You can recognize “when someone is persecuted not for confessing Christ’s name, but for wanting to demonstrate the values of the Son of God”. Thus, it is a kind of “persecution against God the Creator in the person of his children”. – [April 12, 2016](#)